



Newsletter 60 Spring 2013

Cylchlythyr 60 Gwanwyn

In the footsteps of St Asaph...

And the sun shone... Often, in the case of a Welsh Saint, the history says, "A Sixth Century Welsh Saint of whom little is known" but, as the 'usual suspects' gathered in Ebeneser Presbyterian Chapel (Welsh) in Rhuddlan, they soon learnt that there was much more history to the "Elwy Enclosure" and St Asaph than they might have first thought. The group chose to meet in Rhuddlan where the Calvinistic Methodists established themselves c 1770 when Robert Jones of Rhoslan opened a school at the Banquet House which still stands in Princes Road. The early preachers had a torrid time. William Griffith was stoned and assaulted; another preacher was thrown over the bridge and narrowly escaped drowning. Early meetings were held in various houses and in 1802 an old barn was made suitable for preaching until the first chapel was built in 1819. This was enlarged in 1869 with the adjacent hall built in 1908. In the hall the travelers gathered for refreshment, proceeding through the chapel itself to the vestry for the Chairman's welcome and details of the day.



Bethlehem © Crown Copyright RCAHMW

The Chairman introduced the Revd John Owen (Ruthin), who gave a fascinating lecture on "Emrys ap Iwan – the Man". Emrys ap Iwan, born in 1848 in Forlas, Abergele, lived the fullest of lives until his death in 1906 from cancer of the liver. This quintessential Welshman was a preacher, trained in Bala College, who, when re-

refused ordination for his opposition to some aspects of the Church, ironically spent two years teaching English in Lausanne, until he was finally

ordained in 1883. He had a passion for Welsh language and culture, following the maxim of Mazzini, “the life of a nation is as important as the life of a family”. Interestingly, his views were in accord with a European context (1848 had seen a European Spring of revolution) rather than the context of the English / British Empire. His dream of 1892 was 'One Wales – free – with her Language'. A further report on John Owen’s lecture will be held back until after the Denbigh Eisteddfod when, Capel very much hopes, John Owen can be persuaded to give the Capel Lecture on this topic. The introductory lecture was followed by a description of the history and life of the chapel and its community.



Capel Cefn Meriadog © Crown Copyright

From Ebeneser, the visitors scampered cross country, causing the same land-rover to twice back up along the single-track path to let a convoy of some eight vehicles to gain access to and from the car park at Capel Cefn Meriadog.

The ladies of the chapel provided, in the recently modernized schoolroom, a very acceptable lunch after which the travelers gazed across the valley at the incomparable view ...and the sun shone... as they made their way into the chapel to hear its history and a history of the area dating back through carbon-dated bones from the local cave some 30,000 years! From the back cover of the book by local historian, Meurig Owen, who spoke to the assembled gathering, the travelers, now rapidly becoming ‘pilgrims’, heard of caves once inhabited by rhino, bear and early humans; of a Giant who sat on a hill in Cefn Meriadog and dangled his toes in the River Elwy half a mile away; Meiriadog, the monk, who left this spot for Cornwall, then went on an extended visit to Brittany; a holy well visited by Thomas Pennant and Gerard Manley Hopkins; Sion Tudur, poet of the court of Elizabeth First; a Roman road likely used by Queen Victoria, John Wesley, Dr Samuel Johnson (and the Romans on their way from Varae to Caernarfon; Cross Foxes, once a public house, the home of Elizabeth

Jones, the mother of H Morton Stanley, famous son of the city of St Asaph; and Catrin o Ferain, of Royal Tudor blood, who married four times and became known as the "Mother of Wales)...and all this in the parish of Cefn Meiriadog, a mere part of St Asaph. The chapel itself was one of the earliest chapels in the area. The Association granted £20 towards building a 'house for preaching' in 1796 (Abergele was 1791). Howell Harris had come to Denbighshire in 1741 to Henllan and Llanfair Talhaearn but Cefn Meiriadog had remained unawakened. Games and markets were held on Sundays and preachers came to preach against them. John Davies was assaulted but soon a Sunday School opened at Tyddyn Uchaf. In 1796 the land was purchased and, without debt, a first chapel was built. In 1862, a larger chapel was built with the name Tabernacl, though the name is not used.

Peniel (Wesleyan) Methodist Chapel, on the lower Denbigh Road, was the next stop. Miss Heulwen Ellis and her colleague, Mrs Rees, introduced the chapel and its "commodious" vestry to the group. With amusement and affection they shared reports from the local press of the planning, fundraising and building of the chapel and its Welsh and bi-lingual life within the local community.

The pilgrims then reverted to a journey on foot. ...and the sun shone... Pilgrims are taught to visit Jerusalem and see the Holy City through one's feet. St Asaph was a city which demanded the same devotion. From Peniel, the pilgrims walked across the River Elwy and stopped for a short time under the bridge where the very first Free Church services were held. In the early years of opposition from the Cathedral and the Parish Church, the Calvinistic Methodists did not have the confidence to meet there and so had moved out to Cefn Meiriadog. Then onwards, past the new H M Stanley memorial, designed by local children, and through the Gemig, past the site of the first Ebenezer Chapel (1807) and the desperately sad sight of the second Hen Gapel, Presbyteriaidd Ebenezer, (1843) a chapel,

which had become an auction and antique furniture sale room.



Hen Gapel
© Crown Copyright RCAHMW

Now once again for sale, it was showing signs of dereliction, the ramped path to the front door (at first floor level) now completely overgrown and inaccessible. The hopeful sign, however, was that the congregation and community was alive and living on. The pilgrims later found out why.

Up the steep hill, past the Memorial to Bishop William Morgan and those who had translated the Bible into Welsh where we were reminded that when the English remember 1588, they think of the Spanish Armada, but when the Welsh remember 1588, they remember the first translation of the Bible into Welsh. Round the corner and the pilgrims entered Bethlehem! Formerly an Independent (Annibynwyr) Chapel, when Ebenezer Presbyterian Chapel closed in 1968, the Bethlehem chapel with all its contents was made over by deed of gift to the Presbyterians for the continued use of the two (Welsh) congregations. The congregation and the community were alive and living on. The interior has now been modernized with new fittings and furniture but has retained a number of memorable fittings from the old chapel.



Waengoleugoed Independent Chapel © Crown

The final visit of the day was to Waengoleugoed Independent Chapel (Welsh). The start of the Independent cause was in the barn of John Jones of Waen farm, and in 1815 he gave them a piece of land to enable the members to erect a chapel. He was not a member but gave valuable

and as the chapel thrived, it was decided that a new chapel was needed. Land was bought from the Llanerch Estate and a new chapel opened in 1892. The old chapel was sold and converted into a house. Like some of the other chapels visited on the day, it was built away from the main centre of population but still today is alive and thriving with services of worship and services to the community in its newly refurbished hall and vestry, with kitchen, disabled access and disabled toilet. The pilgrims were greeted by a chapel decorated for its harvest festival and with the art work from its specialized service to elderly people and persons suffering from dementia. The children, sparked into lively activities by "Messy Church", had decorated a 'Prayer Tree' and placed their productions around the chapel. Professor Marie Lloyd Williams introduced the life of the chapel to the assembled gathering. Although the chapel gave the impression of being miles from anywhere, it is a living, serving centre of community. It served the pilgrims with a tea-time '*viaticum*' – cakes and tea and coffee – to fortify them for the journey home ...and the sun shone...
PJ

Chapels reported to Capel

Applications:-

Horeb C.M., Llanfairfechan, Conwy – conversion to dwelling. Principle acceptable, but detailing unsympathetic. Our views are in line with those of Conwy BC who are liaising with applicants

Siloah, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire. Approval granted for alterations for worship and community use.

Tabernacle Independent, Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire – conversion to dwelling. A well considered application, keeping some interior detail. Recommend approval.

Closures:-

Hill Mountain Wesleyan, Burton, Pembs – closed Aug 2012

Moreton Wesleyan, Begelly, Pembs – closed Aug 2012

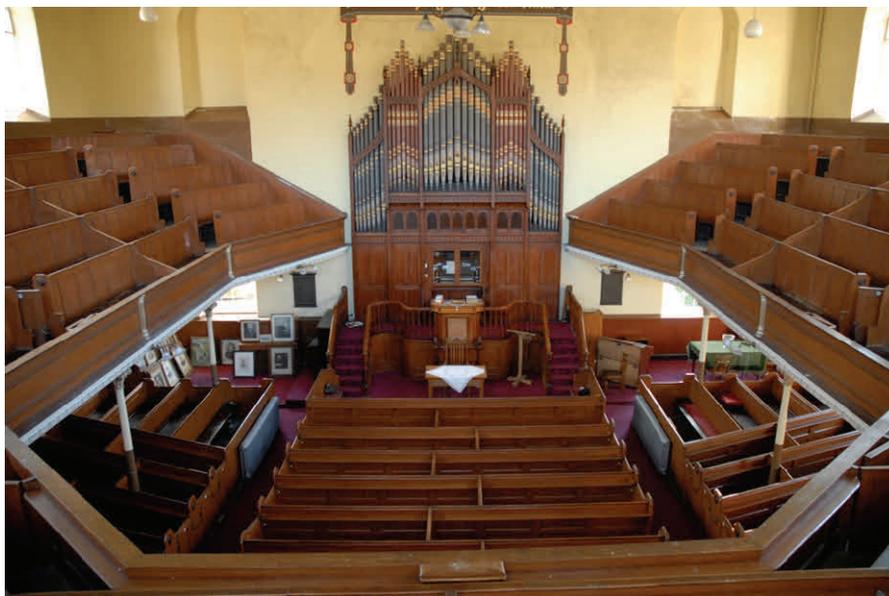
Capel Llwynnadda (C.M.), Ceredigion – for sale

Capel Babell (C.M.), Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire – for sale

Merthyr Chapels Remembered

Recently a successful heritage event was held in Canolfan Soar, Merthyr to discuss and promote the heritage of chapels in the borough. Between 10.30 in the morning and 4.00 in the afternoon Soar was a hive of debate and discussion.

With attendees from across Wales in the audience the day was centred around a series of lectures on topics such as “Non-Conformity in Merthyr”; “The History of local Chapels” and the life and architecture of these fascinating buildings. The chapels were very important in people’s lives in Merthyr at one point; chapels were not only places of worship but also of singing, drama and education – in many ways a forgotten part of Welsh heritage. Theatr Soar itself was once the site of one of the largest chapels in the whole of the South Wales Valleys, with Joseph Parry himself leading the “Cymanfa Ganu” (hymn singing) here. The perfect place to hold such an event. All those who attended the day thought that a chapel heritage day was an excellent opportunity to learn and promote local heritage and to have a better understanding of local history. A similar event will be held next year to promote further the understanding of religion and chapels in our history. For more information contact the heritage officer in Canolfan Soar on 01685 722 176.



A story of dissent, Bethania: “A Palace of the Oral Arts”

Bethania is a Welsh Baptist chapel, listed at grade II* in 1997 in Maesteg, the principal town of the Llynfi Valley north of Bridgend. It was acquired by Ymddireidolaeth Addoldai Cymru/Welsh Religious Buildings Trust (The Trust) in 2004 as a very important example of the Welsh Nonconformist heritage, to be conserved and repaired as necessary, opened to the public and in particular returned to use by the local community.

Bethania Chapel is the largest of six chapels in the care of The Trust. The Trust was brought into being in 1999 by Cadw and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action to take into care important examples of Wales’ non-Anglican religious built heritage which have become redundant: in practice this means the rich heritage of Wales’ Nonconformist chapels that has been described as the “national



The Trust has been working with Heritage Lottery Fund, local people and organisations to develop Bethania as a Bilingual Cultural Heritage Centre; a Centre for Dissent and Nonconformity in the south Wales Valleys, to provide Welsh Language activities, cultural enrichment and learning opportunities.

This will be a flagship project for the Trust, developed as an exemplar project working with the local community to create a centre which will breathe life into an important redundant Nonconformist chapel designed by a major chapel architect.

The project will include the conservation and repair of the original fabric, fixtures and fittings of the chapel auditorium to the highest standards and to the original 1908 condition. To meet the needs of new users, it will also be sensitively adapted through minimal interventions, including the sensitive incorporation of a removable stage to enable a wide range of performance possibilities.

The attached schoolrooms and ancillary rooms are less architecturally significant and, along with a new extension on land to the rear, these will be converted into office space, meeting rooms, dressing rooms, rehearsal rooms, local history society archive, café/bar, bookshop, kitchen, and toilets.

The rise of Dissent and the role of the Welsh Language in this, the differing development pathways of Nonconformity and the birth of the differing denominations across Wales have had a significant impact on the religious, cultural, educational and social life of Wales; resulting in over 6000 chapel buildings having been built for a population of 2.42m (1911) It is important to “place” the story of Bethania within the context of the wider story of Dissent/Nonconformity and interpreted as such.

A substantial collection of documents and artefacts dating from 1908 together with knowledge and memories gleaned from surviving members of the congregation will be used to interpret the local story of Bethania and Nonconformity. However, it will be part of a wider interpretation plan linked to the Trusts’ portfolio of Chapels and other chapels from across Wales working with and in partnership with other organisations.



Obituaries

Stuart Rivers 1942-2012

Members of CAPEL were greatly saddened to learn of Stuart's death on May 18th, 2012 shortly after the Spring meeting. Stuart had a lifelong interest in conservation, beginning in his early years with tramways and then taking on the architectural heritage. After early retirement on the grounds of poor health, Stuart took a degree in History and Archaeology at Bangor University in 1953. He served in the Leeds Civic Trust before moving to Llandudno in 1972 where he formed the Llandudno Civic Society. The first project was to save St John's Methodist Church which was to be demolished to make way for an extensive Marks and Spencer store; that is the reason for the split site which M&S occupies today with St John's Church preserved in the middle. The second successful project was the saving of St George's School, and more recently the fine Baptist Chapel, Tabernacl was put forward at Stuart's initiative to be taken into the care of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust. This failed only because the building is part of the Mostyn Trust leasehold estate which covers much of Llandudno. Stuart was a joint founder of the Victorian Extravaganza, a three day festival which brings over 250,000 people into Llandudno each year. Amongst other interests, Stuart served on the Conservation Panel for Conwy County Borough Council, an advisory body on architecture throughout the County and was on the Civic Trust Advisory Board for the former County of Clwyd. Stuart and his wife, Elan became CAPEL members in the 1990s and Stuart served for several years on the CAPEL Committee. He organized the excellent CAPEL Day in May, 2007 in Trefriw and Llanrwst, the only occasion when we had a harpist to accompany our lunch!

Several members who attended the funeral in Llanrhos Parish Church were privileged to visit an exhibition demonstrating Stuart's many interests, arranged in the church hall by his daughter, Gini – a quite amazing record of his achievements.

Stuart was a most enthusiastic member of CAPEL and his presence at our meetings will be greatly missed.

Peter Mason

Geoffrey Veysey 1934 - 2012

Geoffrey Veysey, who died on 31 March 2012, was one of the founder members of Capel and remained a committed member of the society throughout his life. Born in Abercarn in Monmouthshire he was educated at Lewis School, Pengam and what was then the University College of North Wales, Bangor where he read history. After graduating he took an MA under the supervision of the eminent historian Professor A H Dodd. He then trained as an archivist in Bangor. After posts in England he returned to north Wales in 1967 as assistant archivist in the Flintshire Record Office. He spent the rest of his career in there, rising to become County Archivist. The Record Office was congenially housed in The Old Rectory in Hawarden just across the churchyard from what is now Gladstone's Library but in Geoffrey's time was known by its original name of St Deiniol's Library. During his long career in Hawarden Geoffrey became one of the most influential of the Welsh archivists. He retired in 1994. He continued to live in Hawarden for several years after his retirement and remained active in the Flintshire Historical Society. Throughout his life he made important contributions to professional and local history publications.

At the first Annual General Meeting of Capel in Llandrindod in November 1986 Geoffrey was elected a member of the executive committee appointed to guide the affairs of the new society. The very first issue of the *Capel Newsletter* included an article by him on the Clwyd Chapel Project which was being sponsored by the Clwyd Record Office at its branch in Ruthin. He continued to serve on the executive committee of which his extensive historical and archival knowledge and experience made him a much valued member. In 1995, following the death of Commander A F Mortimer the previous year, he shouldered the burden of Treasurer of the society. Geoffrey remained Treasurer of Capel until 2006. His service to the society throughout this period was invaluable. He was meticulous and utterly reliable in his custodianship of our finances. He was very faithful in his attendance of meetings of the committee and also the spring and autumn meetings of the society. Given that Geoffrey had a lifelong problem with one foot which made walking difficult his determination to take a full part in all our activities was impressive and indicates how important the society was to him.

Outside Capel I came to know Geoffrey personally through contacts in the course of our work. I was also a regular visitor to St Deiniol's Library which gave me opportunities to meet him in Hawarden. His rather

lugubrious manner meant that it took time to get to know him but once the breakthrough was made he was an engaging and immensely knowledgeable companion. Sadly, his final years were marred by poor health and he left Hawarden to be near his family in Gwent where he died.

Lionel Madden

Llyfrau/Books

The Chapels of Wales, D. Huw Owen (Seren, Llandysul, 2012), 313pp, paperback ISBN 978-1854115546, £14.99.

Most readers will be familiar with the author's *Capeli Cymru* (2005), which contained black and white pictures and information for 111 chapels across Wales, but for non-Welsh speakers the introduction and concise histories were less accessible. In this new English language publication, the same author has revisited his earlier work and provided new colour images of over 120 chapels. The selection of chapels has been based primarily upon their listed grading by Cadw and this ensures that all of them are important to Wales. The introduction has been extended and updated providing a very useful historiography of chapel studies in Wales. It discusses the major changes in chapel architecture, the different styles and the architects involved in a concise and very readable way. The real strength of this work however is in its discussion of work done in Wales over the decades that is perhaps less well known. A background to the political will that increased the protection and awareness of chapel buildings that were increasingly under threat and how this, in turn, fuelled more media attention. Set against this backdrop the author goes on to discuss other relevant publications and in some cases their accompanying exhibitions and TV series. Projects that have taken place to record the importance of the chapel in Wales are noted such as the Royal Commission chapel survey that notes details of over 6,400 sites and the survey of over 600 chapels in Glamorgan in the late eighties as well as the formation of Capel in 1986. As a starting point for the study of Welsh chapel architecture the introduction will be useful for many years to come.

The entry for each chapel consists of a colour image and a two-page history of the building and significant events and people associated with it. The architecture of each building is described and attention is drawn to important internal features such as organs and Galleries. It is often difficult to find out information about the recent history of a chapel, especially the reasons for closures; it is therefore very welcome that the author provides

these details and notes the current status of each site. Each entry ends with a list of titles for further reading. The inclusion of Welsh chapels outside of Wales makes for an interesting contrast and examples from Liverpool, London, Australia, Canada, America and Patagonia are included. A glossary of architectural terms associated with chapels completes the work, although a distribution map might have been a useful addition. The author has produced an accessible and detailed book on the subject and one that will do a lot to improve awareness of the plight of the Welsh Chapel buildings.

The Churches of the Cynon Valley, Alan Vernon Jones (CVHS, 2012)

Alan Vernon Jones has followed up his authoritative 2004 *Chapels of the Cynon Valley* with this new publication documenting the history of all thirty two churches in the same locality. The book spans the history of the churches from their origin in the sixth century to the Victorian period, looking at the history, art and architecture of the buildings, as well as including local history of the towns and villages in which the churches are located. At 294 pages, it contains over 300 photographs, many in colour.

The book costs £20 plus £5 p&p, and can be obtained directly from Alan at:

3 Holly Drive
Cwmdare
Aberdare
CF44 8PB

A Request for Help

Architectural Glass Centre
Swansea Metropolitan University
Alexandra Road
Swansea SA1 5DU

Dear Sir/Madam

I have in recent years, as part of a research project, been investigating the presence of 'stained' glass in nonconformist places of worship in Wales. I have previously had articles published in local and national newspapers and in the Welsh media which have led to some very useful, although limited, responses. I am extremely grateful to those who have shared information so far, and who have generously given their time to open chapels and churches to allow me to view and photograph glass. Ministers and members of congregations have been a prime source of valuable information and discovery. Their memories of visiting other chapels and churches and seeing glass has been a major source of information.

My intention is, particularly bearing in mind the rapid closure and loss of so many places of worship, to record as much of the glass as I can while access is still possible. Windows are an important record of artists, glaziers and, perhaps more importantly, much loved and respected individuals, ministers, and those who lost their lives defending the country in two world wars.

Different individuals, congregations and/or denominations may hold different views regarding the use of art, images, and particularly stained glass in their places of worship. I would be very interested to hear your views. I am particularly interested in your opinions on how, or if indeed whether, the stained glass, often given as memorials, should be preserved for future generations.

All research projects are finite and this one must end in the next twelve

months. I would be most grateful for anyone who can help me with this research to get in touch. If you have views and/or information on stained glass in nonconformist places of worship in Wales, or can identify possible locations, please contact me by telephone on 01792 481084, by email at: alun.adams@smu.ac.uk, or by writing to me at the address above. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Alun Adams

Architectural Glass Centre
Swansea Metropolitan University

Chapel Society visit to Liverpool

The Chapels Society summer visit will take place on **13 July 2013 in Liverpool**. This visit is being arranged by Chris Wakeling and Alan Petford – details are not yet available but it is likely to be of interest to those interested in Welsh Chapel architecture and architects. Details will be forthcoming on the Chapel Society's website www.chapelsociety.org.uk

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